

***CT Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance
151 New Park Ave #75
Hartford, CT 06106***

TESTIMONY

Public Hearing

Melissa Marshall, J.D., Coordinator, CT Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance

Public Safety and Security Committee

February 14, 2019

In support of: Proposed H.B. No. 6957 AN ACT REQUIRING CERTAIN STATE BUILDINGS TO BE ACCESSIBLE TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.

In support of: Proposed H.B. No. 6951 AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF PERSONS WHO ARE DEAF, HARD OF HEARING, OR DEAFBLIND IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS.

Senator Bradley, Representative Verrengia, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

My name is Melissa Marshall and I am the Coordinator for the CT Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance (the Alliance), a coalition of over 250 people with all types of disabilities. On behalf of the Alliance, I am testifying in support of Proposed House Bill 6957 and Proposed House Bill 6951.

Many of the obligations under Propose House Bill 6957 AN ACT REQUIRING CERTAIN STATE BUILDINGS TO BE ACCESSIBLE TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES existing now under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Since the ADA was enacted nearly thirty years ago, it may surprise you to learn that many of Connecticut state buildings are not accessible. One example of structural barriers that prevent people from having equal access to government programs and services is the fact that many of Connecticut's state courts are not accessible. In 2016, I led a team, as a consultant for the then Connecticut State Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities that conducted an access survey of court buildings in Hartford, New London, New Haven, Bridgeport, Danielson, Waterbury. With the exception of Waterbury, the courts

were fraught with barriers that would exclude or limit participation of people with mobility and sensory disabilities from participation of court programs and services. For instance, we found that there were no compliant rest rooms in the Hartford Court on Lafayette Street. In fact, when I was called for jury duty in the winter of 2018, I was excused from jury duty, against my wishes, because there was no accessible rest room in the Lafayette Street Court building.

Proposed House Bill 6957 also would extend obligations beyond the ADA. Power doors, even though they are critical to access for people with disabilities are often not required under the ADA. This bill would mandate the installation of power door in state buildings.

We urge you to bring Connecticut into the 21st century for people with disabilities by favorably considering this bill.

We also urge you to support Proposed House Bill. 6951 AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF PERSONS WHO ARE DEAF, HARD OF HEARING, OR DEAFBLIND IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS. As a consultant for the Partnership for Inclusive Strategies I had the privilege of being one of three authors of a 166 page after action report on the impact of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria and the California wildfires on people with disabilities http://disasterstrategies.org/application/files/3615/2718/6466/5-23-18_After_Action_Report_-_May_2018.compressed.pdf.

I can categorically state that people with disabilities including people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind are disproportionately impacted by disasters. People who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind were consistently denied equal access to disaster related programs and services despite legal requirements prohibiting this. Connecticut should take steps to ensure when the next disaster strikes Connecticut it is prepared to serve people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind equally.

Thank you for your consideration.